

**Prepared Statement for the Record
Of
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**Before the
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
Resources Committee
United States House of Representatives**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Our Nation is experiencing record breaking and uncharacteristic wildfire seasons that leave in their wake millions of acres of blackened forests and wildlife habitat, thousands of destroyed structures and the loss of human life.
- Western states and local governments are in desperate financial shape because of declining revenues brought on by decades of declining forest management activities, especially on our federal lands.
- There remain many barriers that prevent the treatment of the current forest health crisis on the National Forests. Excessive planning and environmental analysis, overlapping agency jurisdictions, conflicting management policies and inadequate funding must be addressed if we hope to make real headway in restoring forests to health.
- An opportunity exists now to use smaller forest fuels to manufacture wood products, produce paper goods and generate electricity – all which will contribute to our nation's economy and benefit working families.
- We need leadership -- leadership from the Administration and Congress to aggressively address the problems that exist in order to restore our forests to health, protecting them as well as wildlife and communities from uncharacteristic fires.

TESTIMONY

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman. My name is Owen Squires and I am the Director of the Rocky Mountain Region Pulp and Paperworkers Resource Council (PPRC). My testimony today also reflects the views of the Idaho AFL-CIO, PACE Local 80712 and Local 80608 and the members within the PPRC. These organizations represent a vast majority of our nation's pulp and paper workers, forest products workers, as well as the people living in rural forested communities that face an ever-increasing risk to uncharacteristic wildfires.

I would like to thank the Chairman, and members of the Committee for their hard work and leadership in securing the passage of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. This legislation, along

with the President's Healthy Forests Initiative, has provided western rural forested communities hope along with an expectation that the dangerous fire risk situation in our national forests and close to our homes and communities will be addressed. But let me make it perfectly clear that only with adequate funding, strong leadership, congressional oversight, and some additional relief from out of date laws, will the situation improve.

My testimony today will focus on issues associated with the plight of wood products workers and the people who live in rural forested communities in the western United States. The issues I will discuss are: 1) The realities in rural economies; 2) The lack of needed infrastructure to complete necessary forest management activities ; 3) The out-of-date laws that impede active resource management; and 4) The barriers that result from there being no real incentives to find solutions to management challenges.

My point of view is that responsible, active forest management will help promote the long-term health and sustainability of our nation's forestlands as well as the economic viability of rural communities. It is imperative that efforts continue to focus on protecting forests, wildlife and communities. In order to accomplish these important objectives, both the Forest Service and Department of Interior must be provided the tools and funding they need to implement forest management and fuels reduction activities.

Western States and counties are in desperate financial shape because of declining revenues and a shift in population brought on by decades of declining Federal timber harvest levels.

In Clearwater County Idaho, local school districts are considering a four-day school week in order to lower costs. Without the revenues that once came to schools from timber harvest receipts, school administrators are forced to look for ways to reduce expense. Unfortunately that cost-cutting sometimes comes at the expense of our children's' opportunity to learn.

On the Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho, Shearer Lumber Company which lies on the outskirts of the small town of Elk Cit, must close its doors after (1958) 46 years of operation. One of the main reasons for the mill closure is the lack of log supply. This situation seems impossible to me – I can stand in the sawmill log yard and literally throw a rock into the Nez Perce National Forest. But endless litigation stops almost every management project the Forest proposes. . This is doubly troublesome because the Nez Perce National Forest is in the middle of a severe forest health crisis. Millions of acres of Lodgepole pine are dead or dying as a result of a devastating bark beetle infestation, and root rot.

In Oregon, f 100 State Police troopers have been laid off and in Washington State in the budget crisis is causing lawmakers to make very tough choices. A book could be written about California's economic woes.. Many states are in the same tough economic condition, due in part to a drastic reduction in revenues from timber harvest activities on the National Forests. Other western states where the manufacturing and industrial support infrastructure has all but disappeared are in similar shape.

After the 2002 Los Alamos fire in Arizona, the machinery to do the forest cleanup had to be brought into the state from Denver. There isn't a company left in the region that has the infrastructure to support the needed salvage and restoration activity.

When a mill shuts down, the first thing that happens is the trained personnel move away seeking other employment. Then the mill is dismantled and the property is given to the county or the city as a future industrial complex, removing it from the property tax rolls. The homes and property that once belonged to the mill workers is bought up and converted to summer cabins or vacation homes. We continue to see one rural community after another change from places where working people made good livings and raised their children, to vacation destinations for others. The rural landscape and culture of Idaho will be forever changed .

The solutions are as complicated as the problems, but a few opportunities stand out providing a place to begin.

When President Kennedy pointed the Nation toward the moon in 1961, Americans understood this was a long- term commitment, not one of election cycles but one of generations. One of the problems with Forest Service management policies is that they change every four to eight years along with the political winds. Instead, we need a long-term solution. If there are mistakes we can adjust. We don't know what products and services are going come from our national forests just as we could not have dreamed about the future, at the beginning of NASA.

To continue to allow the present gridlock to continue is unacceptable.

There are many preservationist organizations, whose leadership makes six figure salaries working toward continued gridlock. They continue to seek donations thus maintaining the present do-nothing policies. To find a solution is counter to their finical goals.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, a very serious problem facing our nation's forests has been identified and needs our immediate attention. It affects hundreds of million acres of our public wildlands and places millions of private acres and tens of thousands of rural communities at risk. We have the science, the professionally trained resource managers and a workforce ready for the task. What we need is leadership – leadership to act. Our expectation is that both the Administration and Congress will continue to provide that leadership, in a bipartisan fashion, to overcome the hurdles, provide the funding and meet the challenges of improving forest health, enhancing wildlife habitat, protecting rural communities and using the excess forest fuel to manufacture wood products, produce paper goods and generate electricity. Without this leadership and the resulting action on the ground, people living in our rural forested communities will continue to lose hope and the likelihood of businesses investing in the needed infrastructure to accomplish this critically important environmental work is seriously compromised.

This concludes my prepared remarks, I would be glad to answer any questions you or the subcommittee may have regarding this important issue.

The Map

As the PPRC and others traveled to Washington, D.C. and other places to talk about the sad legacy of mill closures and displaced U.S. workers, it became apparent to us that we needed a visual tool to help us illustrate the damage poor forest policies have caused.

Friend and co-worker Marvin Dugger years ago worked up a map that showed the mill closures in the west. Seeing a need to show—the impact nationwide, last year we decided to work up a map of the entire country. Micheal Labertie in Michigan ,Don Wesson in Arkansas and I coordinated an effort by the PPRC to collect from all over the nation a data base of mill closures and lay-offs.

Hence the U.S. map became a reality. Today mills are closing faster than we can update the map. Many mills have closed or had lay-offs that aren't on this map. Potlatch, Mead-Westvaco, Georgia-Pacific and Smurfit-Stone Container to name a few . This map doesn't show the secondary tremendous financial hardship on communities.

Alcoholism, Child Abuse, crime and social poverty plague our depressed, rural communities -- that is what this map represents.

Once proud wage earners now begging for a hand out while their forests burn .